

Atendiendo Familias Latinas:

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How to best serve New Immigrant Latino families

Latino Parent Network

- An extension-based coalition bringing together Latino parent experts and Latino serving agencies in order to increase access to resources for parents living in North Carolina. Agencies coming together to create resource listing brochure and wallet card
- The brochures & wallet cards will provide information on the type of services available and phone numbers for these services.
- 5,000 brochures and 2,000 wallet cards are being distributed to Latino serving establishments (tiendas and restaurants) and community centers

Focus Groups in Each County

- 15 focus groups were held to ask parent their opinions
- 1hr focus groups with Spanish-speaking
- Grounded approach was used to evaluate parents views and the meanings they ascribe to these views
- Surveys with 202 Extension personnel about their work with the Latinos in their counties

Key Issues Expressed By Parents

- **Trouble with the Law**
 - Reduce the fear!
 - Driving?
- **Discipline**
 - Miscommunications / Expectations
 - "Falta de respeto" and "mal educados"
- **Children's Schools**
 - Having a voice / Communication issues
- **Nutrition**
 - Choosing healthy foods to eat
- **Housing**
 - Working with "duenos" (landlords) and employers

Key Factors For Serving Immigrant Latino Families

Becoming Culturally Literate

Paying attention to personalismo when recruiting and working with Latinos. Personalismo is a cultural value in which interpersonal closeness and connectedness are expected. Overlooking personalismo can impair the ability to build sound working relationships with this population. Building trust and personal friendship is vital to helping Latino families. Many people from Latin American countries bring with them a custom of telling about themselves and developing a relationship before they are willing to trust you. These parents are more likely to follow the instructions of a friend than an expert who is a stranger, no matter the expert's credentials. This means you must first be a friend. Parents expect agents to open up to them as well, and you will be expected to share information about your family to create this mutual trust.

Members of Latino households generally play certain roles in their families. Fathers are expected to show responsibility and resourcefulness; mothers—nurturance and compassion; children—obedience and respect. Child care providers wishing to retain Latino families should have a working knowledge of how these roles play out in a particular family's life.

Hierarchies exist in many Latino families, wherein fathers are respected as the gateways to their families. For example, outsiders are often expected to meet with the father first, to ask to speak with him first when on the phone, to use a formal manner at first when addressing him (i.e., Señor Perez), and to consult him about decisions that affect the family. Though Latina mothers essentially make the decisions and carry out most of the parenting, most mothers appreciate the security that comes from the involvement of their husbands. These roles are dynamic and fragile, as many families are under stress to adapt to U.S. culture. Remember that the parents are the experts about their families' needs, though they may seek advice from agents who have a better understanding of U.S. systems for doing things.

Bridging Language Barriers

If Latino parents feel forced to speak English, which is a foreign language to many, it may compromise the ability of agents to retain Latino families in their programs. Some parents may feel confident speaking in English, but their level of skill may lead to difficulties of understanding on both sides. Additionally, speaking only in English may isolate some parents. How to start: 1) Start small and find inroad (A church, community group, & team up); 2) Work with Latinos that speak English; 3) Familiarize yourself with some dual language flyers/handouts and learn common phrases to introduce these to Spanish speakers; 4) Make the attempt to speak Spanish, and 5) Invest in Bilingual/bicultural employees

Reducing the Fear for Latino Parents

Fear of formal systems is common among both recent and not-so-recent Latino immigrant parents. Much of this fear comes from the treatment of immigrants by the "migra" or Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), now named the Citizenship and Immigration Services of the Department of Homeland Security. Many Latinos view agencies and community institutions as authorities, rather than partners, and parents may need personal attention to overcome the intrinsic fear and deference that comes with this relationship.

To become trusted as part of the Latino community, you must create community networks and partnerships with other organizations and agencies that already serve Latino families. Agents can accomplish this by taking active roles in cultural events and celebrations within the Latino community, and this will help to reduce fear among these families.

Creating Coalitions

Even the smallest communities in the country are becoming aware of the need for educators and service providers to work together to serve the growing Latino population. These individuals and agencies would do well to identify other similar partners and form coalitions to share resources and provide better services. These partnerships also create opportunities for giving advice, solving problems, coordinating services, and disseminating resources. The multifaceted lives of Latinos often pose significant struggles for non-Latino providers, and these collaborations can potentially prevent problems in the community and provide invaluable solutions to current dilemmas. 1) Legal services related to citizenship, immigration, and driver's licenses; 2) Public services pertaining to such issues as welfare, housing, and Social Security; 3) Educational services for parents and their children, such as GED classes in Spanish, simplified English classes, computer training, and interpreter services; and 4) Social services, such as aid, counseling, and advocacy for victims of domestic violence.

Use Individualized Recruiting and Reminders

To find and keep in touch with Latino families, use the media outlets they use. For example, get your picture and message out in the media both through Spanish newspapers and local Spanish television stations, if there are any. Mailers, advertisements, and other publications should be distributed in both English and Spanish, and special attention should be placed on culturally acceptable wording and appropriate levels of literacy. However, flyers and advertising are some of the LEAST effective methods of recruiting Latino parents and their children. Instead, parents are much more likely to respond to invitations to participate made by trusted individuals, such as priests, pastors, or Latino community leaders. Other effective techniques include personal visits to family homes, phone calls, and personal, handwritten invitations. Also be aware that many Latino parents work during unconventional times and may need special help to attend educational events.

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